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1. [Opinion: Half a century of climate panic hasn't worked. Let's get smarter](#)

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Opinion: Half a century of climate panic hasn't worked. Let's get smarter

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Body

The recent UN climate summit in Glasgow was predictably branded as our "last chance(<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/30/is-this-our-last-chance-to-act-on-the-climate-crisis>)" to tackle the "climate catastrophe(<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/cop26-our-last-chance-to-tackle-climate-catastrophe-1.4712744>)" and "save humanity(<https://www.huckmag.com/perspectives/cop26-is-our-last-chance-to-save-humanity/>)." Like many others, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry warned(<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/climate-change-9-years-john-kerry/>) us that we have only nine years left to avert most of "catastrophic" global warming.

Almost every climate summit has been branded as the last chance. Setting artificial deadlines to get attention is one of the most common environmental tactics. For the past half-century we have continually been told that time has just about run out. This message is spectacularly wrong and leads to panic and poor policies.

Two years ago, Britain's Prince Charles announced we had just 18 months left to fix climate change. This wasn't his first attempt at deadline-setting. Ten years earlier, he told an audience that he "had calculated that we have just 96 months left to save the world."

In 1989, the head of the United Nations' Environment Program declared(<https://twitter.com/BjornLomborg/status/1424475734148583425>) we had just three years to "win - or lose - the climate struggle." In 1982, the UN was predicting(<https://twitter.com/BjornLomborg/status/1424475727836164101>) planetary "devastation as complete, as irreversible as any nuclear holocaust" by the year 2000. At the first UN environment summit in Stockholm in 1972, the organizer and later first UN Environment Program director warned(<https://twitter.com/BjornLomborg/status/1424475720835899392>) that the world had just 10 years to avoid catastrophe.

In 1972, the world was also rocked by the first global environmental scare, the so-called "Limits to Growth" report. Its authors predicted that most natural resources would run out within a few decades while pollution would overpower humanity. At the time, the future was described by Time magazine as a desolate world with few gaunt survivors tilling freeway-median strips, hoping to raise a subsistence crop. Life magazine expected "urban dwellers will have to wear gas masks to survive air pollution" by the mid-1980s.

They were all wrong because they overlooked the greatest resource of all: human ingenuity. We don't just use up resources; we innovate smarter ways of making resources more available. At the same time, technology solves many of the most persistent pollution problems, as did the catalytic converter. This is why air pollution in rich countries has been declining for decades.

Terence Corcoran: Climate policy lesson learned: Doomed to fail(<https://financialpost.com/opinion/terence-corcoran-climate-policy-lesson-learned-doomed-to-fail>)

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Colin Craig: Things to do with CO2(<https://financialpost.com/opinion/colin-craig-things-to-do-with-co2>)

Robert Lyman: The latest new thing: a woke auditor-general's office(<https://financialpost.com/opinion/robert-lyman-the-latest-new-thing-a-woke-auditor-generals-office>)

Nonetheless, after 50 years of stunningly incorrect predictions, climate campaigners, journalists and politicians are still selling an immediate apocalypse, and to great acclaim, by ignoring adaptation. Headlines that rising sea levels could drown(<https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/miami-other-coastal-cities-may-drown-in-80-years-study-says>) 187 million people by the end of the century are simply foolish. They imagine that hundreds of millions of people will remain stationary while the waters lap over their calves, hips, chests and mouths. More seriously, they absurdly assume no nation will build any sea defenses. In the real world, ever-wealthier nations will adapt and protect their citizens better, leading to less flooding, while spending an ever-lower share of their rising GDPs on flood and protection costs.

Likewise, when activists tell you that climate change will make children face twice as much fire, they rely on computer models that only include temperature and ignore humans. Real societies adapt and reduce fire because fires are costly. That is why global fire statistics show less burned area over the past 120 years and why a future with adaptation sees less, not more fire.

These unsubstantiated scares have real-world consequences. An academic study(https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3918955) of young people worldwide found that most suffer from "**eco-anxiety**." Two-thirds are scared and sad, while almost half say their worries impact their daily lives. It is irresponsible to scare youths when the UN Climate Panel finds(<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>) that even if we do nothing to mitigate climate change, the impact by the end of the century will be a reduction of an average income increase from 450 per cent to 438 per cent. A problem, yes, but hardly the end of the world.

Panic is a terrible policy advisor. Activist politicians in the rich world are tinkering around the edges of addressing climate change, showering subsidies over expensive vanity projects, such as electric cars, solar and wind, while the UN finds that it can't identify an actual impact on emissions from the last decade of climate promulgations. Despite their grandiose statements about saving the world, rich countries still get 78 per cent of their energy from fossil fuels. And as the Glasgow climate summit has shown (for the 26th time), developing nations - whose emissions over the rest of this century matter most - cannot afford to similarly spend trillions on ineffective climate policies as they try to help their populations escape poverty.

Fifty years of panic clearly haven't solved climate change. We need a smarter approach that doesn't scare everyone and focuses on realistic solutions such as adaptation and innovation. Adaptation won't make all of the cost of climate change vanish, but it will reduce it dramatically. And by funding the innovation needed to eventually make clean energy cheaper than fossil fuels, we can allow everyone - including developing countries - to sustainably go green.

Financial Post

Bjorn Lomborg is president of the Copenhagen Consensus and visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. His latest book is "False Alarm: How Climate Change Panic Costs Us Trillions, Hurts the Poor, and Fails to Fix the Planet." !@COPYRIGHT=© 2021 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

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